

LANDSCAPE INTERVENTIONS:

Building with Willow - The First Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative

Designing The Seating Area - The Second Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative

Landscape Interventions - Involving the Users

Introduction

Restrictions on space does not allow here for the narration of the complete story of the sequence of changes that occurred in Burnside Primary over the three years; these appendices give some more details of my activities in this school.

It was the case that the school became interested in the school grounds while I spent time there and that their interest has in no way waned since I have pulled away from my work there. While I was involved some teacher-initiated projects to change the school site were begun. Loose play objects were introduced through the initiative of a couple of teachers. The balls, and toys were specially selected to withstand the high use they would get from children. The loose play equipment was placed in boxes for individual classes and brought out and back each day. The organisation and maintenance of these boxes needed constant monitoring and became the bane of some teachers lives because of arguments and conflict between the classes. A neighbour was involved in an ongoing debate about the loss of a 'catchtail' (a ball with a kite-like attachment) which ended up in her gutter. The children were reprimanded by the neighbour (and the teachers) for going into this garden on more than a couple of occasions to retrieve these play objects. In the end the skipping ropes and some other toys that remained in use became quite popular and were made an integral part of the playground culture. Of interest here is the progression from a teacher initiated and controlled intervention in play culture and the successive interference in relations with one local which results finally in an normalisation of behaviour (toy use) so that it became unproblematic. Playground cultures are not easily managed and controlled by teachers (mainly because of the spatial arrangements - teachers indoors and children outdoors) but

there has to be a benefit in encouraging greater responsibility among the children for their actions: once toys are lost they are not replaced until the next year; the children had to face the problem with the neighbour in consultation with the teachers. It is also worth noting that the final arrangements for playtime using the loose objects become the organisational responsibility of the children with minimal monitoring by the teachers: playground life seems to be mostly the children's domain.

At the time of writing a project is under way to deal with a problems of litter and mud 'run off' from an embankment. In an application for funding the teacher who was in charge of coordinating the work notes these objectives:

- ◇ To provide the playgrounds with fixed litter bins to would encourage the children to become more environmentally aware of the "litter problem" in our school grounds and to do something about it.
- ◇ To involve the children in the design and construction of a low level wall and an outdoor classroom (amphitheatre) in the infant playground. This would help to address a number of issues, including the creation of an area for children to sit or shelter; an area for teachers to take children outside and have a seated outdoor classroom from which to teach about the environment. It would also help to hold back the mud that runs down off the grass in wet weather - which tends to coat the children every time they go out to play - and makes mums and dads unhappy too!
(From an application for for funding made to a couple of funding agencies)

They school is involving a few classes in designing and helping to construct a wall to stop this which would also function to enhance the play opportunities for the children and provide new spaces for planting of trees and shrubs. The starting points for making changes has to be seen as adult initiated here. The problems are simple and adult-oriented ones: the children litter the playground and the children come into the school filthy. But a reconfiguration of the objectives can mean that children can learn and participate at some level in making the changes: they can become more environmentally sensitive with their litter and develop an environmental ethic and they can find new places for socialisation and friendship in new settings. There were also plans to involve the children in doing some of the building works. All of this is part of a sequence of changes that have happened in this school grounds over the last two years: playground markings, logs for seating, two willow

sculptures, the seating area project, a wildflower garden initiative, and other smaller changes like the introduction of loose play equipment, and the sectioning off of areas of grass that is let grow long for children to play in. To date funding has come from local business (through the voluntary fundraising activities of a few parents), from grants (from the local council, and from a scheme of grant aid for school ground by British Telecom) and from the Parent-Teacher Association funds. The cost of this latest project in total is expected to be in the region of £5,000.

During the course of my visits to Burnside Primary before many of these initiatives were up and running, I became interested in facilitating some planning and design work myself with the staff and children. I wanted to try some ideas out using participatory methods designed especially with children to involve their own 'local knowledge' in defining planning processes. Two phases of work are documented in the appendices: the story of my efforts to involve children in the installation of two willow 'sculptures' (Appendix C): ***Building with Willow - First Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative*** and the designing of a seating area (Appendix ?): ***The Seating Area - Second Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative***.

Next some narrative about my own attempts at planning, design, and environmental change with the children in Burnside Primary. Both of the narratives about my efforts to engage the children in changing their school grounds fall into the broadly 'catalytic participatory research' style that I have discussed in the methodological considerations section. I evaluate the initiatives from a set of objectives I advocate in hindsight for work of this kind that highlight the misconceptions and misgivings I have about having tried to work with children in a school setting in this way. In hindsight I was working from a premise that lay somewhere in my unconscious: that perhaps if I learned the language and ways of the children in this locale, I could then work with them in helping them to initiate changes. I used a set of photographs of other school sites as a body of evidence of what other schools had tried. This 'data set' of photographs was, of course, a biased set of colour images of other people's views of what counted as 'best practice' which was bound to colour their views. But I hoped their selections from the photographs was done in a way that helped them to reference their own desires by the way I sequenced their choices as icons, images and metaphors that were important to them. To get things going I decided to build on what I felt I knew about children's special places by getting the children to remember their own

playground histories and the attendant changes that took place in the playground in the recent past. The evidence gathered for this

Building with Willow - First Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative

I wanted to try out the idea of using willow as a material for building constructions in the school grounds. I thought this might make an appreciable difference to their play and to their attitude to the playground from the point of view of ownership. From what I had learned from children's own experiences in den and gang huts in other settings, I was hopeful that there was potential for 'simulating' this in a school grounds setting. The use of willow to build enclosed spaces met with the children's own reported preferences for dens that were 'Quiet, Houselike, Natural, and Private with Views'. Over time, the 10-14' long willow rods will self-root and grow as a hedge making a dense structure with walls and a roof. The gaps left would allow access. The creation of a Willow Den had thus many advantages as a design solution:

- ◇ Willow structures seemed to provide an possible solution to the problem of vandalism once they are given a chance to grow. It was not that the willow structures were indestructible, but they were natural materials that would not be such a great loss if damaged or lost.
- ◇ Using willow allowed for a greater amount of children's participation in the construction phase as the technology needed was 'child-friendly'.
- ◇ The constructions can mimic children's own 'found' dens or constructed 'dens'; they can allow for children's own appropriation of the structure by bringing in loose objects, the convening of groups of friends there and the use of the structure as a starting point for many children's games: hide and seek, imaginary games involving role play, 'tig' etc.
- ◇ They are 'living' sculptures that can add to the aesthetic value of a play space, provide opportunities for learning about trees, the changing of the seasons etc
- ◇ They provide natural enhancement of a site, creating places for wildlife and increasing biodiversity generally.

The idea was also that this school grounds initiative might spark off further enthusiasm for

change among children and staff. I did most of the design work myself but I involved about 200 children in building the structures. As I was new to the building of willow houses and tunnels, I was also 'finding my way' with the children in the work I did. The photographs document the growth, development, and demise of the structures over time. In the end they lasted but a year due to a very heavy use by the children and smaller amounts of damage. Finally the local council was over enthusiastic with their use of weedkiller and it was only a matter of time before the structure was taken away completely. While it lasted, it was very heavily used by children of all ages and at no time did we see purposeful vandalism. It could easily have been thrown in the burn at any time but it was not. Certainly a schools grounds project for further research and investigation. Willow provides a child-friendly building material that satisfies the need for safety, the restoration of native species into a school site, and the installation of a feature that allows for learning about the environment while also reflecting the children's own desires for a place to meet, gather, and play in den-like structures.

Assessment of the Building with Willow Project

This project is similar to so many projects that claim to involve children as participants in schools grounds changes. This project could claim fairly high levels of participation because:

- the children actually built the willow structures themselves with a lot of supervision and help by myself over ten days (some 180 children contributed to the work)
- the children could daily repair and amend the structure with twine and string and could, had they survived, have continued to weave and remodel the structure as it grew and developed
- the children were involved in some aspect of the planning of where the willow structures were to go

But I found that I had missed out on opportunities for more in-depth participation by the children because:

- ◊ I had wanted the project to get off the ground as a starter project to inspire enthusiasm in the changing of school grounds
- ◊ I was personally so committed to the idea that I really did not involve the children in decision-making. It was my idea and I was going to see it through regardless once I had

no opposition from the teachers.

- ◇ I did not communicate with some children about the project except informally through the work-based participatory aspects of the project. I could have involved the janitor, parents, and the Council more. The Council did weedkill around the base of the willow structures to keep the weeds down but others felt this killed off the plants at a vital stage.

The state, moreover, cannot do everything, nor know everything, nor manage everything - indeed its maximum effectiveness consists in the destruction of whatever escapes its control. (Lefebvre, 1974, p381)

As an adult I find that my own sense of agency carried others along to get the project completed at the expense of increased levels of participation. Other cases of work I have seen in other schools have purposefully slowed down work (and even refused adult help) to get the children involved in decision making, planning, and physical labour as well. There were lessons to be learned.

Overall, the children seemed to really enjoy the structures. They were a real favourite with many children and there was a real sense of ownership resulting from the fact that the children had participated in building them. (See plates C.1. and C.2 page 17, this appendix) Everyday, at playtime, children made use of the den and the tunnels for play. Younger children said they really enjoyed the narrow parts of the tunnel; older children reported using the dome as a place for playing 'tig' and for using as a place for imaginative role playing. Some primary seven girls suggested they research the popularity or otherwise of the willow tunnel among the primary 1s and 2s for me. They recorded their responses to being asked what they thought of it. Children's responses included:

This is cool; I like going in; I like it because my Mum likes it; I like going through it; I like going out; I like the narrow bit. (Primary 1s and Primary 2s)

However, a few factors meant that both structures came under a lot of pressure in their use:

- children leaned up against them and pushed each other against them
- children made new entrances and exits
- there was little other diversion in the playground so they received a lot of attention
- in the evenings children returned to the structures and played there

In the end the structures became very unstable and were unfortunately removed. Staff and children asked for the structures to be reinstated but this has not happened as yet. As part of the next cycle of my action research initiative, I attempted to involve the children more in their own researching of the spaces they hoped to change, thereby increasing their participation in more aspects of changing a place. Following West (1998, 1999) I hoped to involve the children in a form of participatory learning in action where children would take a greater lead in making decisions with adults as collaborating advisors.

Designing The Seating Area - Second Catalytic Participatory Research Initiative

In and through the space of leisure, a pedagogy of space and time is beginning to take shape. ... The space of leisure tends ... to surmount divisions: the division between the social and the mental, the division between the sensory and the intellectual, and so, the division between the everyday and the out-of-the-ordinary (festival). (Lefebvre, 1974, pp384-385)

I had seen some work done by architects and by teachers in other schools and I felt there was an opportunity for trying out some participatory methods with children that might enable a greater sharing of control of decision making. At this stage, my familiarity with the children and staff meant that I was primed to take up a sort of insider-outsider role in the school - the children knew me but I was still an irregular visitor to the school and was not a paid employee. As an 'insider-outsider', I took up the additional role of facilitator of change with an up front advocacy for children's involvement in as much of the planning, decision making, and physical work as possible in this project. Two classes were interested in doing a project on planning and design (that was part of their curriculum). But instead of doing planning and design in an abstracted or simulated way, I hoped to effect 'real' school grounds change. The teachers listened to my proposed plans and invited me to work with them and their classes. This opportunity would allow me to look at the process of involving children as participants in the changing of the play space within the political context in which I found myself as advocate. In this way I hoped to get an insider's feel for the opportunities and barriers to participation while reflexively I would evaluate my own project

as a visitor in the same way as I had planned to do in other schools. Because I would work to increase the children's participation as much as possible, I could also investigate the children's sense of participation from a different angle: the children's review of *our work* (as teachers and a researcher) with them would be revealing to me in a more personal way because we had also hopes for the project. My own participation as catalytic-participatory-researcher would also be part of 'the data' to be written about and reflected upon in even greater detail than before. To bring in the effects of embracing some elements of reflexivity, I include 'Reflexive Comment' within the narrative.

The Role of Virus

The metaphor I use for my own involvement in the school in question was 'catalytic participatory researcher' (see chapters 9 & 11, main volume). In the case of this piece of fairly classic action research, the metaphor of catalysis is not dissimilar to a parallel metaphor of 'infestation by a virus'. The latter image carries connotations that reflect a lack of definitive ability in the researcher to name, record and be certain about causal effects between people and people and between people and place. There are many unknown factors to be considered. In environmental thought the 'precautionary principle' is advocated to allow for the 'unforeseen'. Similarly, like a virus that mutates in different hosts, my own influences would be unpredictable even within myself. As a virus in the system of a school, I would affect, or 'infect' some, and leave others free from infection; still others would have complete 'immunity' to my offerings. As the virus (or message) spreads, it changes. Communication seems to occur in a mutant rhizomatic fashion, erupting in unknown ways in unexpected places. In the same way, the environment - a place - can be reactive in the same way as humans can. In attempting to design, or build, a new place, constraints of time, money, and labour will be combined with varying amounts of 'resistance' from the place itself: the unexpected siting of a drain, the depth of soil, weather factors, plant growth and so on. It is into this unfolding drama of people and place that I went as but one force among many. I attempted to engage the children in seeing the possibilities for change as much as the possible hazards and resistances to change that lay before them. I openly referred to financial, and politically sensitive factors that contextualised their potential role in making a difference and being involved in designing a new place. The children too were quick to recall some 'bad' experiences they had when some older students from a local secondary school came in and did design work with them and 'nothing came of it'. Resistance to further

‘infection’ was strong for some.

Another metaphor for my work would be facilitation. Like a facilitator, I would invite participation, give direction to the children and adults, and enable their plans to come to fruition in any way I could. The spin off attitudinal changes, the off-hand comments from teachers and children would be the research effects worth recording. Centrally, the story, or narrative of what occurred would be a data sequence in itself. Placed in the context of the research as a whole it can provide a jumping off point for readers to rethink their own roles in whatever context: researcher, teacher, designer. The next section reads in part like a narrative that tells how things progressed and in part as a story that exposes difference between my work and other attempts to involve children in participation in environmental design and change.

Finding Children to Work With

Because I knew the children were wary of getting involved in any project that may not succeed, I decided to set a few things in place. I had a fair idea that the project was going to be possible from a labour point of view because I had the offer of some voluntary help from the Prince’s Trust.

Reflexive Comment

Here I find my adult-oriented worry about children’s inability to deal with ‘yet another disappointment’. As adults we run the risk of disappointing children in involving them. The solution to this can be to secretly put things in place that the children are unaware of to preempt disappointing outcomes or to deal with the possibilities in a more participatory way by coming cleaner than I had done with the chances of success. the latter tack would run against the Western view of childhood which sees children in need of protection *from* dangers.

The head teacher was keen that I have a go but was otherwise not keen to be involved directly. On discussing the possibilities with some of the teachers, I had the offer of working with two classes who had design as part of their curriculum for that term. I had continued to become more friendly with the teachers both professionally and socially so my working with them was easy and informal. I was in effect becoming very much part of the teacher-culture of the school which centred around activities in the staffroom and still maintained contact with the children in the playground which was a playground-oriented culture. This was important to the texture of my participation and the relationship I could

develop with the children, who continued to call me ‘Greg’ and who would sometimes confide with me in different ways. As an ex-teacher, this difference was palpable; I spatially demarcated this difference by sometimes making my presence felt on the playground during playtime while the teachers stayed inside to eat their lunch.

Reflexive Comment

I found that the embodied and spatially distinct experience of dealing with the children and the adults in this case to be illuminative of the way in which schools as institutions construct the different worlds of childhood and adulthood. To be participative with children in the context of this school required a struggle for time and space between the teachers and the children. To get decision making and gate-keeping done I needed to be indoors, on the phone, interacting with the staff; to be involving the ‘users’ of the playground, the children in participative ways I needed to get to know their world by being there during the playtime. Finding forums for discussing and deciding as a group with adults and children together was easier in classroom settings but irregular and difficult to organise across a school of 500+ pupils even with representatives from different classes.

Getting Started

Initially, the children were quick to tell me how despondent they were about even trying anything. It had all been done before. Their playground was a bit of a disaster already. There was a history to the place that needed uncovering I felt. In discussions it transpired that the local secondary school had involved children in planning and designing some changes to the playground in the past and *nothing had happened*. As was the case in many schools I visited, the experience of tokenistic involvement (see Hart, 1992) was detrimental to later participation. Like so much of the literature about planning and design education, the focus is often on the *process of design* outside of the political culture of control and decision making. As a way into doing a survey of the grounds, I decided to use a narrative approach. First, we visited the playground and told each other stories about what goes on in the different places in the playground. Some of the stories were from their recent memories, some from their memories from younger days. The children acted as researchers with really useful knowledge (West, 1998, 1999) and uncovered these stories (titles below) initially:

STORIES FROM THE 'BIG ONES' PLAYGROUND'

1. Playing tig inside the hut
2. In icy weather children would create human 'pile ups' when sliding down
3. Playing with the catchtail
4. Playing 'Girls Chase the Boys'
5. Playing 'Tig' (a chasing game)
6. 'The Ramp' (the ramp provided by the local authority for allowing the wheelchair access to one of the outlying classrooms): swinging, running, jumping, hopping, sliding down the bannister, throwing 'grenades'. It also functioned as a 'Den area'.
7. Piggy backs: play fights
8. 'The Bars' (two parallel bars designed for swinging on): getting up, falling off
9. Logs: sitting on them, play as on a boat
10. 'Kiss, Cuddle, Snog or Torture'. (a game; tortures included dumps, punches, a kick, a slap on the back, a slap across the head, a trip, etc)
11. 'King of the Lamp Post' (a game)

Fig. C.1. (Above) List of places and the names of stories the children narrated about them.

Next, we visited the playground and asked them to remember back to times when the playground looked different. the class teacher helped out with some of the details of the stories. We learned that these features once existed but were no longer there:

MEMORIES OF OLD EQUIPMENT

- **The 'Boxing Ring'**: an area roped off for climbing in; people used to fight there.
- **The Wooden Chute**: a wooden slide that became 'unsafe' once the wood decayed.
- **The seats around the tree**: someone broke one; later they became unstable. I found out that the PTA (Parents Teacher Association) tried to get them fixed but they had to be removed.

Fig C.2. (Above) Memories of Old Equipment.

Children reflected on their use of places when they were younger to evaluate the possible uses by younger children of any designs they might have. We devised this schematic way of looking at places and what they were used for to show the intimate way that people relate to place:

PLACE / SPACE	&	WHAT WE USED TO DO THERE (when in P1 & P2)
<i>bushes</i>		Barbies, pretend houses, go in for shade, climb
<i>the big tree</i>		collect leaves, shade, ladybirds, ants, spiders, a place to meet and gather with others, a place where things were thrown up into the branches, pile up the leaves and throw them
<i>small tree</i>		squeezing through, tie up your friends
<i>the corner</i>		telling secrets
<i>the fence</i>		sitting on
<i>the hard & soft mud</i>		playing with cars, sliding
<i>the grass</i>		fighting, making snowballs (One memory: being hurt by a snowball)
<i>the tarmac</i>		practising for the sports day, running about, (One memory: falling)

Fig. C.3. (Above) Places and their associated narrative memories.

We could now see that the playground had meant different things and had been changed before by others and that we were not the first to have tried to make a difference to the place. They came to understand that places existed in their imaginations depending on what age they were, what the weather was like, and what physical features were still present in the playground. In addressing the ‘children’s own histories’ - that is ‘by letting what they have been, what they have done, and what they know contribute to the constitution of its practice’ (Wenger, 1998, p215), I hoped to encourage participation. But I also needed to involve their hopes for the future. I needed to get to know what their personal ‘hopes trajectory’ might be for any changes to the school grounds and try to incorporate this into our plans. It became clear to me that to involve the children would *require a very open, and clear communication of objectives* as is often not the case when designers work with children. I offered an ‘opt out’ choice for those who felt they were not prepared to risk the possibility that nothing would happen; two or three children took up this option until the project was up and running. I ‘came clean’ on the possibility of outside agency help that I had virtually put in place. I openly let them know what the opportunities were but kept them aware of the possibility that we might not succeed in making any changes or that the changes we could make might be a failure in some sense.

Reflexive Comment

By attempting to work with the children in this way I was trying to usher in a new culture in the classroom. At least I felt I alluded to the world where the patronising of children was not acceptable, where their 'real lives' (including their emotions and agency for change) were to be considered carefully, where their views had to be listened to, where the constraining factors effecting the project had to be explained to them clearly about things like finance, time constraints, the need to consult the teachers, neighbours, and other children. The freedom to be involved in a 'real project' brought responsibilities for them and me which I attempted to be open about. If learning was part of it, it was about learning to find a cultural space where meaningful and consequential communication could take place. Something was at risk: it was trust between adults and children that had been broken in the past; it was the making of a difference to a place that was consequential to their daily lives. They were not taking any chances this time round.

What Makes a 'Good Den' in the Playground?

While I had some understanding of children's preferences for dens in their locales, I felt I needed to get a better understanding of how some 'places' functioned for the children in their own constructions of a social world in the playground. A 'den' in the playground is not the same as a 'den' in the local woods. When I discussed what makes up the components of a 'good den' when playing games like 'Tig', the children told me: 'It can't get too crowded.' 'It has to be clearly marked and easy to see so people can know when they're 'in' or 'out'.' 'It has to be near places to hide.' 'It might have something to touch or hold on to so that you can show you are in the den especially when playing 'Tig'.'

We decided that a good den site for playing games has to be ...

- ◇ big enough for the size of the game (enough space)
- ◇ clearly defined by an outline or border (good definition)
- ◇ in a suitable location near the action of play (good location)
- ◇ be able to last (good durability)
- ◇ be safe (good safety and stability features)

Some 'Dens' the Children Had in Use

The children were able to map out the places they used as 'dens' when playing chasing games: The steps up to the ramp, bushes area, the big tree, the man-hole covers, doorways, back of the school, the small gate onto the grass, the logs, the lamp post, the willow hut.

Reflexive Comment

Here I find myself working out of the metaphorical understanding of the child as 'tribal'. but I do not document the child's world for the adult's world to see. I did try to get the children using some language that I felt would become useful for their next exercise in planning and design. To do this, I held up the child's world for the children themselves to see. I feel I validated their world, perhaps, by making it a visible culture to the children *within the confines of the classroom* where usually knowledge is constructed by the teacher or by the texts the children use.

What Did The Children Want?

My next efforts to involve the children required an analysis of the options for what could be done in the school grounds. We set out by first looking at what other schools had done by looking at photographs of other developments. I had some 100+ laminated photographs in colour on card (see samples in plate C.3 page 18). I asked the classes to group their photos according to themes that they came up with themselves. They were asked to come up with collective names for their photographs; they used words like 'fun', 'eating', 'wildlife' etc for their collections of similar places as they saw them. We discussed how the most interesting places in the designs seemed to be places that had a multiple function: some places could be for 'fun', 'wildlife' and for 'eating' depending on how they were used.

Reflexive Comment

By working with the symbolic and use-function side of 'how places work' I was attempting to get beyond the temptation of the children just picking out some ready-made feature they would like from a development in another playground. By addressing later what 'kind of a place they would like to design, i.e. a place for 'some activity' (like eating, climbing etc), I could get to their own desires as a group which I would help negotiate as a facilitator. Our own local solution would have to be different to what we saw in the photographs because of the constraints of the site and the budget etc. which we would discuss in some detail.

Next, the children were asked to think about what kind of a place they would like to designed for their own playground. Particular activities undertaken in suitable places like 'chatting' or 'gathering' were noticed and the photographs were place in sets of thematic place-use by groups of children who had to work together. I represented the children's discussion of these themes on a chart using the photographs they selected (see below?). We presented our findings to each other within each class and between each class. Then they were asked to consider what place-function they would like to design for. Using a 'pairwise ranking procedure' (a participatory method from the family of Participatory Action

Research techniques) I facilitated the group in coming to a consensus. Fig. C.2. (below) shows how, without prior consultation, the two classes came up with the same conclusion: the majority wanted to design and install a ‘place for eating’ in the playground. With discussion between the children who had not opted for this objective for the project, we eventually agreed almost unanimously, to go ahead with this as our design objective. The two teachers were involved in agreeing this objective too who felt it would be a worthwhile development in the playground. The headteacher would have to be involved in deciding who would be allowed to access this area during breaktimes and would be the one to decide on any disputes should the place be in high demand.

Reflexive Comment

The ‘gatekeeper role’ taken on by the head teacher indicates the position the children had in decision making in the school. It is common for children to be invited to have a say in some aspect of the running of the school through school councils but the input of children rarely gets carried through to include the majority of significant school decisions; children’s participation in school grounds changes are positioned within the adult regime of decision making that occurs in the staffroom and sometimes within the head teacher’s office or mind.

A ‘PAIRWISE RANKING’ OF ‘PLACE-FUNCTION’ THEMES

Mrs. Y	Mrs. X
1. Eating	1. Eating
2. Games	2. Games
3. Fun	3. Fun (same score as no. 2.)
4. Play	4. Play
5. Den site	5. Chatting
6. Gathering	6. Sitting
7. Tig	7. Learning
8. Chatting	8. Gathering (same score as no. 7.)
9. Colourful place	9. Den
10. Sitting	10. Tig
11. Learning	11. Colourful

Fig C.4. (Above) A ‘Pairwise Ranking’ of ‘Place-Function Themes’ {derived from photographic analysis by two P5 classes (n=60 approx)} Motivation for selection: preferences for the ‘design of a place in the school grounds that would provide facility for these above listed activities.

Once we had decided on what area outside would be most suitable for the development we set about getting our ideas on paper. The next phase in the work involved groups of children drawing up their ideas. As adults we worked closely in discussing the possible materials they thought they could use to construct their ideas. This involved being really realistic about the possibility of getting their designs built in a reasonable time scale within a reasonable budget using the available expertise we had at our disposal. I would suggest alterations to their designs if I thought we could make it work more easily. In the end we did not pick any one design but drew up a new plan in collaboration with the volunteer workers from the Prince's trust. There was a definite sense that the children could not 'come all the way' in doing the design work for this project. We had sixty children and a lot of designs. Our 'dilemma' was that we could only work in so many of the features of a design and we did some of this work as adults separate from the children. Pragmatism was a driving force: budgeting and possible materials meant that some serious alterations to the plans were made with a view to making additions to the seating area later.

Reflexive Comment

Some learning here was that we could have involved volunteer children more closely in the making of the compromises we made. We were still either patronisingly excluding the children because we felt they were unable to make a contribution at a meeting between adults, because we imagined they would not find it interesting, or because we feared they would be disturbed by a sense of the world's unfairness. We were also shy about bringing children into a cultural setting that the visiting adults might find unusual: where adults make the final decisions! We could not find an easy, culturally acceptable way of involving the 'constituency' of children (two classes of 30 each) in decision making at an advanced level without making serious interventions in class timetables and spending a lot more time at it. We did try to discuss and get 'clearance' for the decisions we made in children's absence and this seemed to work once we had a certain amount of trust.

Plates C.1, C.2, (over, p17). Two stages in the life of the willow den sculpture.

Plate C.3, (over p18). An example of the way I used photographs of other playgrounds in classroom workshops to catalyse children's participation in the design process.

Two plates
one of children &
willow hut
other of willow (green)

plate of
pics I used